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Lawmakers Angry After Iran Briefing

Casey Insists Reagan Was Not Obliged to Inform Congress About Arms Deal

By SARA FRITZ, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—CIA Director William J. Casey, in closed-door briefings for the House and Senate intelligence committees Friday, disclosed details of U.S. arms shipments to Iran and angered the lawmakers by insisting that President Reagan had no obligation to inform Congress of them.

While most committee members kept their pledge not to divulge the highly classified information imparted by Casey, House Majority Leader Jim Wright (D-Tex.) said he had learned in the briefing that other countries in addition to Israel had shipped arms to Iran with the blessing of the United States. Wright also said that U.S. shipments were valued at more than $12 million.

Casey's briefing did nothing to quell congressional criticism of the Iranian deal or of those White House officials who planned it. As they emerged, Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) called the arms sales "ill-conceived and ineptly implemented" and Senate Democratic Leader Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) said the operation was "incredibly clumsy and amateurish."

Pressure for Shake-up

At the same time, congressional pressure began building for a shake-up at the White House.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) urged Reagan to hire "some additional people who are perceived as big leaguers" for his White House foreign policy team. But he declined to call for any resignations.

"Maybe what they need is a more generous supply of good ideas and a lively clash of intellect," Lugar said. "It appears to me that things are thin there (on the White House staff) and there needs to be a lot more talent."

Byrd said Reagan's national security adviser, John M. Poindexter, "may have to go." And Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) added, "I'm not really an advocate of the fall-on-the-sword approach to government, but there's clearly been bad advice here, and maybe that would clear the air."

What angered intelligence committee members most was Casey's assertion that the President did not violate the law by failing to notify congressional leaders in advance of the shipments. Congress did not learn about them until two weeks ago, when reports began appearing in the press.

'No Intention of Informing Us'

"It is my opinion that they had no intention of informing us until—for some reason—it went public," said Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman David Durenberger (R-Minn.). "Whether they broke the law or not, they intended not to inform the American people, they intended not to inform Congress. . . ."

Congressional sources said they believe the President's decision to keep Congress uninformed was an outgrowth of the long-held suspicion among Administration officials that Durenberger and the committee's ranking Democrat, Sen. Patrick J. Leahy of Vermont, could not be trusted to keep secrets from the press.

In a letter sent to the President after Casey's briefing, Durenberger and Leahy questioned why the White House was willing to take the enormous risk involved in sending former national security adviser Robert C. McFarlane to Tehran to conduct negotiations "while the comparatively minor risks inherent in informing (congressional leaders) are used as a justification for keeping Congress unaware of such significant intelligence activities."

According to the committee members, Casey said that he was instructed by the President's directive of last Jan. 17—which waived the U.S. embargo on the sale of weapons to Iran—not to inform Congress of the Iranian operation "until further notice."

"The (directive) probably was created in order to protect Casey . . . more than anything else," said a source who attended the briefing and refused to be identified. "I think Casey probably said I'll not go ahead with that unless I'm directed in writing."

The law requires the CIA director to notify congressional leaders and the ranking members of the intelligence committees in advance of all secret operations around the globe. But in especially sensitive cases, such notification need not be made in advance—as long as it is "timely."

Many Republicans and Democrats insisted that Reagan failed to fulfill the legal requirement for "timely" notice. Asked to define the President's obligation, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) said he must tell Congress "what is happening when it's happening."

Denies Other Operations

Wright said that he had asked Casey whether the Administration was involved in any other covert operation without the knowledge of Congress, and the CIA director replied, "We are not." He added that Casey indicated that Atty. Gen. Edwin Meese III had approved the legality of the President's Jan. 17 directive.

The House leader also disclosed that the committees were told by Casey that other countries in addition to Israel had shipped arms to Iran with U.S. approval, but he declined to name them. The Times has reported that France and Portugal supplied Iran with weapons with U.S. knowledge and—in some cases—with U.S. acquiescence. France, however, has denied that it was involved.

"We have learned about people who are citizens of other countries and residents of other countries who have been involved in shipments with the condoning of the U.S. and the complicity of the U.S. in some instances," Wright said. "It seems clear that those other countries that were engaged in shipments to Iran felt—some of them at least, Israel particularly—that they

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were doing the wishes of the United States."

In their letter to Reagan, Durenberger and Leahy indicated that they do not yet understand the Administration's role in shipments by other countries during 1985, prior to the directive signed by the President opening the direct flow of U.S. military goods.

The letter stated, "It is not yet clear how the arms transactions in 1985 came about, what they contained and how these transactions—and especially the U.S. role in shipment of arms—fit within applicable law and executive orders."

The Times, quoting government sources, reported Friday that Reagan was not informed of—and did not approve—the first shipment of weapons and spare parts that Israel delivered to Iran in August, 1985. The story reported that, according to one government source, Israel acted after receiving an unauthorized signal to proceed from a lower-ranking Administration official.

Wright said he understood that the direct U.S. shipments were paid for by Iranians with money deposited in a Swiss bank. Sources indicated Wright's estimate of the total value of the shipments was not based on information supplied by Casey but instead was based on independent calculations of the cost of weapons, including 2,000 TOW anti-tank missiles.

Most Members Satisfied

Most of the committee members indicated that they were satisfied with Casey's willingness to tell the committee what he knew about the Iranian arms shipments even though the CIA director was apparently uninformed about some aspects of the operation. The Durenberger-Leahy letter to Reagan said that "both Mr. Casey and Mr. Poindexter are themselves still engaged in piecing together the full record of this operation."

At the same time, committee sources said Poindexter was "vague and rambling" during his informal briefing for congressional leaders at the White House just prior to Casey's appearance on Capitol Hill. They said the President's national security adviser "spent an hour and a half in a monologue detailing what most thought were trivial aspects" of the operation and "used up so much time there was not any questioning permitted."

After sitting through the briefings, many lawmakers concluded that the full story of the Iranian initiative has yet to be disclosed. "I think we're not through yet," McConnell said.

Times staff writers Michael Wines, Paul Houston and Eleanor Clift contributed to this story.

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